

Coins

1980 outlook: No gold or silver, but plenty of copper in your change

By Roger Boye

FROM THE MAILBAG, here are some questions from readers about coins and collecting.

Q — With the news about gold and silver, I'm wondering what metals Uncle Sam now uses to make our coins. Also, is the metal in any 1980 coin worth as much as the coin's face value? — F.A., Waukegan

A — All U.S. coins produced this year will contain a lot of copper mixed with some nickel or zinc, but no gold or silver. Specifically, the Bureau of the Mint makes cents with an alloy of 95 per cent copper and 5 per cent zinc; nickels with 75 per cent copper and 25 per cent nickel; and all other coins with two outer layers of 75 per cent copper and 25 per cent nickel bonded to an inner core of pure copper.

Except for the cent, the "metal values" of 1980 coins are much less than the "face values." At current prices, the copper in a Lincoln penny is worth more than a half-cent.

Q — I've seen the word "pedigree" used in some recent coin advertisements. What does it mean? — T.P., Schaumburg

A — "Pedigree" refers to the pre-

vious owners of a rare coin. For example, if a collector can prove that his keepsake was once part of a famous collection, he'll likely receive an unusually high price when he sells the coin.

Q — We have an unusual copper coin dated 1838 that is not listed in any coin book we know of. It depicts a kneeling woman, and contains the words "Am I not a woman and a sister." What can you tell us about it? — A.S., Skokie

A — You have a "hard times token" produced by a businessman to help relieve a serious coin shortage during a major depression that started in 1837. The tokens carried various political and patriotic slogans, and sometimes even mini-advertisements. Coin dealers sell fine-condition specimens of the token you described for about \$7.50.

Q — I've heard rumors that a new type of gold krugerrand is being made. Do you have the details? — C.R., Highland Park

A — South Africa is planning to produce a half-ounce krugerrand to sell with the one-ounce version. The record price of gold earlier this year made the one-ounce krugerrand too expensive for many investors.